WILSON'S NUMISMATIC REPOSITORY

VOL. I, NO. 4 Fremont, California MAY, 1983

By now, I am sure that all of you have learned that we lost Abe Kosoff on March 19. The eulogies, tributes and reminiscences have all been given, and there is little that I can add except that we will miss him. I did not know Abe too well, having met him only on two occasions - the first during Garret IV in Los Angleles in March of 1981, and later that same year during the ANA Convention in New Orleans. But I feel as if I had known him intimately as a result of his long-running column in "Coin World," his numerous auction catalogues and the two periodicals he published in the late 1940's and early 1950's. Abe was more than a "coin dealer;" he was a professional numismatist who was always ready to offer his knowledge and advice to those requesting it. Although it was the late Aaron Feldman who urged us to "buy the book before the coin," Abe Kosoff must be remembered as one of the leading disciples of that philosophy. Indeed, his second auction sale, conducted on Aug. 6, 1940, was highlighted by the offering of the splendid library of Julius Guttag. Few early Kosoff sales failed to include important numismatic literature, and along with all of the great coin rarities he sold, virtually every major literary work also passed through his hands.

Abe was one of the last of the dealers from the "old school," having gone into business in 1929. His contemporaries - B. Max Mehl, Wayte Raymond, Thomas Elder, Ben Johnson, Barney Bluestone, Moritz Wormser - are all gone now. I feel as if we have reached the end of an era, and I am sad. So long Abe...

****

I began the last issue of "W.N.R." by proudly proclaiming that it would be published on a regular basis in the future. Embarrassingly, I subsequently failed to state what that "regular basis" would be. Well, how about every other month for starters? It takes several days for me to type the content, and then about another two weeks to have it printed and distributed. Allowing for perhaps one week for it to reach all of my customers, and another week or two for them to respond to any of the articles, I feel that a bi-monthly publication is about the best that I can hope for right now. Present plans call for additional issues to be published in July, September and November.

On a personal note, I would like to thank Dr. Warren Lapp and Mrs. Margo Russell for their very kind comments in "Penny-Wise" and "Coin World" regarding the "Repository." Likewise, I extend my gratitude to all of you who have taken the time to write and express your pleasure with the publication.

****

For those of you planning to attend the ANA Convention in San Diego, it now appears that the annual meeting of the Numismatic Bibliomania Society will be held on Tuesday night, August 16, at 8:00 in the Town and Country Hotel, site of the Convention. There will also be a meeting of the NBS Board of Governors during the week, but the time and location will not be set until all members of the Board can be contacted to arrange a time that will not conflict with other obligations. We are also contemplating an N.B.S. banquet, but again this will not be scheduled until such time as we get a "feel" for how many members plan to attend. More on this in the July issue.

****

While we're on the subject of the Numismatic Bibliomania Society, a number of you have written me to advise that you have joined the organization, but that you have received no formal notification indicating that your check was received nor any indication of your acceptance into the Society. Being a relatively new organization, we have not as yet prepared membership cards, so for the present, official notification of membership will be in the form of your receipt of "The Asylum," our Society journal. If any of you would care to put your artistic talents to work and prepare a proposed design for a membership card, I would be pleased to submit it to the board of governors at the annual meeting in August.

I should also mention that membership dues should be sent to Linda Kolbe, P. O. Box 1610A, Crestline, CA 92325. Linda is our secretary, and she will see that your name is placed in the membership files and on the mailing list for "The Asylum." I strongly urge anyone interested in numismatic literature to join. Annual dues are $7.50 and include a four issue subscription to "The Asylum." I have a small quantity of our last issue, and will be happy to send a copy to any prospective member requesting one.

****

A reader from Pittsburgh, PA writes: "Very much enjoyed March WNR. Hope you keep publishing it. If you need help in covering postage, printing costs... just say so. I don't think it's too much to ask those who are receiving (it) to contribute a few dollars for same."

I appreciate the writer's thoughtfulness in this matter; however, as I stated in the first number, "All persons presently on my mailing list will receive copies, and it will be made available to anyone requesting it at no cost." That was, is and will continue to be my policy with W.N.R. In any business, there are various expenses that "go with the territory," and one of these is advertising. As most of my long-time customers may be aware, I have avoided large "splashy" display ads in the numismatic press. I'll leave that to the coin factories. Rather, I have consistently utilized smaller, less expensive ads in the classified sections. These ads have produced extremely good results for the past three years, and I have built a strong customer base in this manner. I would prefer to allocate my advertising dollars to the publication of a house organ. Oftentimes, word of mouth proves to be the best form of advertising, and since the issuance of Vol. I, No. 1, my mailing list has grown by more than 200 names; yet I have not placed one single ad promoting the "Repository." Nearly all of my new customers have written, requesting the newsletter, and have stated that they were made aware of it by a friend or fellow collector.

Less I give the impression that I am "anti-advertising," let me correct that assumption here. My business, like most, started out as a small part-time endeavor. Being the "new kid on the street," my sales were not of the magnitude likely to get me into the Fortune 500. I realized that advertising is perhaps the most essential expenditure for any public sales organization, and I allocated a percentage of my gross to monthly advertisements. As I grew, I expanded the ads, but I felt that smaller ads placed in several major numismatic publications was preferable to one or two larger ads in only a couple of papers.

As I mentioned in the last issue, I will be conducting my first public auction in San Diego on August 14. I have been fortunate enough to have received some truly fine consignments for this event, and you can rest assured that the sale will be heavily advertised and promoted in the numismatic press.

****

I love the early auction catalogues prepared by the pioneer dealers in the second portion of the nineteenth century. Sadly, these pieces seem not to have achieved tremendous popularity amongst modern numismatic bibliophiles and that is really too bad, as within the pages of the various sales compiled by Cogan, Woodward, Strobridge and their contemporaries may be found some of the most fascinating commentary regarding the infancy of the science. Recently, while sitting here waiting for the phone to ring (sometimes I listen to the light bulb or watch paint dry), I picked up a copy of H. P. Smith's catalogue of the Walter R. Hubbard collection and began casually perusing its pages. The Woodward sale was conducted on July 12-13, 1883 and consisted of 1,020 lots.

Following lot #421 on page 25, and continuing on for three additional pages is a delightful letter exchange between a Mr. W. C. Wyman and Bangs & Co., auctioneers and agent for the sale. The entire text is reprinted below; I am certain you will find it amusing and interesting.

"THE WYMAN COLLECTION"

Is he the Democrat who sought to trace his Party to Ancient Syracuse, instead of Syracuse, N. Y.?

A Mystery from Chicago.

Ohio Central Railroad Co.
Coal Department.
Office, 158 Dearborn St., First Nat. Bank Building.
W. C. Wyman, Western Sales Agent; Formerly Agent Wilmington Coal Ass., and Fuel Agent C.M. & St. P.R.R. Co.

Messrs. Bangs & Co. N. Y.:

Gent.

Sale of 16th, 17th Smith Catalogue will you try to secure for me the following - I give you small lee way above these figures if obliged to, go as much below as possible, and get as many as you can.

297 - 50¢
494 - 7.50
497 - 6.00
514 - 8.50
515 - 9.00

(also 56 other bids of like proportion which proved too low at sale.)

Yours

W. C. Wyman

At the sale, March 16th, '83, the auctioneers purchased for the above order only five lots (out of 61 ordered):

Lot 297	8	@ 25¢	
494		@ 6.75	
497		@ 6.00	
514		@ 7.50	
515		@ 7.00	Total, 29.25

These coins and bill forwarded to above address.

On April 2d Messrs. Bangs & Co. received the following:

Chicago, Ill. Mch. 31st 1883

Messrs. Bangs & Co. N. Y.:

Gent.

I return by this post registered the lot of coins from sale of 16th & 17th. The tetradrachms (there was but one - Smith) are such palpable frauds I lose respect for the lot and return them entire. At this distance we have to rely on the intgrity of dealers, but such specimens as came from that sale is enough to destroy my respect for all future sales.

I have passed these coins among my fellow collectors, to confirm my opinions, and their verdicts are alike, and with me denounce the Countenancing of sales of such trash.

Next catalogue I see of Smiths (sic) I will steer clear of it: you can emphasize these opinions by return of the coins.

Respectfully yours,

W. C. Wyman

On receipt of the foregoing remarkable epistle, the coins were examined, and found to be genuine and strictly as catalogued. The lots 514 and 515 were photographed, and may be seen on the plate issued before the sale of March 16th. To this Messrs. Bangs & Co. replied, April 14th:

Mr. W. C. WYMAN:

Dear Sir -

Your favor of 31st ult. was duly received.

We are surprised at the course you have taken in regard to the pieces purchased for you. Even if the Tetradrachm was the "palpable fraud" that you claim it is, we cannot see what right you have to return the other pieces which were bought according to your orders.

We believe Mr. Smith to be a perfectly reliable man, who would not, knowingly, misstate the condition and character of a piece, and we believe you are mistaken in this instance; and to confirm our opinion, we have referred the coin to Mr. Feuardent, who is the accepted authority in this country on ancient coins, and we enclose his favorable report.

Truly yours,

Bangs & Co.

To this polite letter the honorable(?) gentleman(?) of Chicago deigned no reply. As it now stands, the coins will again be offered with the same descriptions, and I will assure purchasors that if they realize anything over the stated amount, the excess will be sent to Wyman in charity.

---

423 (Lot 297) (337 A.D.) Constantine the Great: 2nd and 3rd br.: fine portraits and busts at various ages, differing titles: revs., the Invincible Sun, Mars and Jupiter the Preservers: cinerary urns on a temple, &c.: struck at Aquileia, Augusta Trevirorum, Lyons and Alexandria: a very fine lot; 8 pieces.

424 (Lot 494) Athens: Diobolus: Head of Minerva like lot 491 (Mar. 16): rev., twin owl(s), the bodies face right and left, have but one head: olive twig: fine and unusual; size 6.

425 (Lot 497) Aegira, Peloponnesus: Hemidrachm of the Achaean League: laureated head of Aesculapius to right: rev., a cross in a wreath, a goat and AEIP in angles: fine; 9.

426 (Lot 514) Syracuse, Sicily: Tetradrachm of the Democracy, before the Athenian Siege, 415 B.C.: obv., female head to right, with long horizontal headdress encircled four times with a cord: dolphins in field,...: rev., a biga to right: obv., fine: rev., roughed by disintegration: still a desirable coin of the "old and 'only original' ante-Jackson Democrats": 16. (Brought but $7.50: owing to a momentary attraction, the attention of bidders was removed from the auctioneer for an instant, the coin meantime was sold: immediately a gentleman offered to advance several dollars on the bid if Mr. Merwin would put it up for sale again - but the auctioneer, true to his trust, firmly refused, and the now famous WYMAN was the reputed purchasor.

427 (Lot 515) Tarentum, Calabria: Didrachm: fine figure of Taras holding a diota and riding a dolphin...: rev., a nude cavalier with a whip: very fine; 15.

(Ed.) Thus ends the "Wyman Saga." For those who may be interested, the prices realized for the five lots were as follows:

423 - 17¢ each
424 - 4.25
425 - 4.60
426 - 12.25
427 - 2.05 Total $24.51

Presumably, Mr. Smith felt relieved from his "charitable contribution" obligation to Mr. Wyman.

Hopefully, the foregoing episode will help you understand why, as I stated at the beginning, I love the early auction catalogues. Read a few; I think you'll fall in love as well. Nowhere else upon the shelves of numismatic literature will you obtain a feeling for the romanticism of our hobby as it existed in a more simple, happy and enriching time.

****

A valued customer reports the following unfortunate incident:

"I received your parcel today, and alas, all is not well. The Postal service awakened their biggest gorilla to scrape it along the floor; the jiffy bag and the plastic wrap were punctured, and the front cover of the ... catalogue was badly scuffed in two small patches in the upper right corner. I took the evidence to my local postmaster, and got quite a lesson in the warped logic and ethics of the gold old USPS. Yes, he admitted, you had packed it securely. Yes, he admitted, it was clearly their fault that the damage had occured. Then, having accepted all of the blame, he fearlessly disclaimed all responsibility. It seems that the Postal Service, well aware of its own incompetence, refuses to accept responsibility for its own blunders unless the package is insured.

"I'll tell you, Cal, it was almost worth it just to watch that poor befuddled old bureaucrat try to make this absurd policy sound sensible and fair. In any case, as my high school football coach used to say, that's water over the bridge! The scuffs, while detracting and certainly annoying, are not fatal. However, for my peace of mind, I would like to request that all of my future purchases be sent insured. I will be happy to pick up the extra costs; I think it is a small price to pay for protection from postmen who have yet to learn basic motor skills."

While I personally feel that the writer might just be a tad too harsh concerning the overall efficiency of the post office, I certainly can empathize with him. I occasionally receive "problem" parcels through the mail, but for the most part, I have had very few problems with the system. The subject parcel consisted of a purchase amounting to less than $25.00, and as is my policy, I did not insure it since the value was less than $50.00. On any purchases of $50.00 or more, I always provide adequate insurance; however, on small orders, I generally do not utilize insurance due to the proportionate cost vrs. the value of the item(s). At the same time, I will insure any item, regardless of value, upon request from the customer. However, on purchases amounting to less than $50.00, I will be forced to add the insurance premium to the invoice.

During my three years as a numismatic book dealer, I have sent out more than 3,000 packages, and to the best of my knowledge, only three have either been lost or damaged in transit. The large majority of these have been shipped book rate uninsured, so I feel that, contrary to popular belief, the Postal Service does a fine job.

In my early price lists, I often explained my insurance policy; however, since I have not done this in nearly a year, I do feel some obligation to the above customer. I have since mailed him a partial refund to compensate for his loss in this case. I will endeavor to state my shipping policies in all future offerings, and hopefully this type of situation will be avoided henceforth.

****

Last fall, I purchased a fairly substantial numismatic library which had been the property of an old time dealer who passed away some years ago. Prior to cataloguing the books for inclusion in my third mail bid sale, I was sorting through the contents, and came upon a small folder containing a few handbills from the late nineteenth century. One of these, issued by W. Elliott Woodward around 1881, was of more than passing interest to me, as it was a listing of the then current numismatic periodicals which could be obtained. A few days ago, while cleaning out some file drawers, I again noticed this handbill, and thought my readers might like to review the opinions of one of our pioneer dealers regarding the quality and usefulness of the early private publications. I hope you enjoy it.

AMERICAN NUMISMATIC PERIODICALS.

FREQUENT inquiries are addressed to me, as to what Numismatic Books are desirable for the young student, and what periodicals are published in the country treating on the subject of Numismatics; to the latter part of the inquiry I here attempt to give a general answer, to which correspondents are respectfully referred.

THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF NUMISMATICS.

The first number of this Periodical was issued May, 1866, in New York, under the auspices of the American Numismatic and Archæological Society, and it was continued as a monthly for four years, under the same management; at the end of which time, and at the close of the fourth volume, the publication was transferred to the Boston Numismatic Society, and has since been issued as a quarterly, under the supervision and editorial management of Messrs. Appleton, Green, and Colburn of that Society. It is in its fifteenth year. This Journal, which began well, has steadily improved, until it now holds a high rank in the periodical numismatic literature of the world; its volumes are in themselves a library, and without them any American Numismatic Library is but a fragment. Subscription, $2 a year; address Jeremiah Colburn, Boston, Mass.

THE CANADIAN ANTIQUARIAN AND NUMISMATIC JOURNAL.

As numismatists and antiquarians we know nothing of the line which separates the United States from the dominions of the good Queen,—hence this excellent publication finds a place in this list. The first number appeared in July, 1872. It is published quarterly, and every number is filled with able and interesting original articles, unsurpassed by those in any kindred publication. The number for July, when issued, will be the first of volume eight. It is published by the Numismatic and Antiquarian Society of Montreal,—subscription, $1.50 a year. Address Geo. A. Holmes, Treasurer, Box 1310 Montreal, Canada.

NUMISMA.

A small quarto paper of eight pages, is now near the close of its fourth year; its editor, a coin dealer, never forgets that he is a gentleman, and his neat paper is always filled with entertaining, original matter. Issued bi-monthly. Subscription, 50 cents a year. Address Ed. Frossard, Editor and Proprietor, Irvington, New York.

THE KURIOSITI KABINET.

Commenced as a monthly in 1870, and regularly issued until August, 1871. Suspended for a time, its publication was resumed in 1872, in which year appeared Vol. 2, No. 1; in 1873 No. 2 came out, which in April, 1876, was followed by No. 3. Since then the proprietor, William P. Brown, 145 Nassau Street, New York, has issued his paper occasionally, and sends it gratuitously to his friends.

THE COIN COLLECTOR'S JOURNAL.

The first number of this was issued December, 1875; at first it was under the editorial management of Mr. Frossard, and gave promise of character and usefulness, but since Mr. Frossard's withdrawal in favor of the present editorial incumbent, Mr. Scissors, who has so many papers to take care of, its high promise has not been maintained, though its owner advertises this in connection with a similar publication devoted to the sale of second-hand postage stamps, as "the leading papers in their lines (50,000 circulation)." Probably about three figures can be safely dropped from this enumeration, and the paper may be bought for one year for one dollar, sent to Mr. Scott, at 146 Fulton Street, New York City.

MASON'S COIN COLLECTOR'S HERALD.

No. 1 is dated June, 1879, a quarto of eight pages, somewhat larger than NUMISMA, and issued quarterly. This paper is the successor of MASON'S COIN AND STAMP COLLECTOR'S MAGAZINE, which commenced in 1867 and ended in 1872. The editor of the Herald wields a facile pen, with a sharp point, dipped in ink with just gall enough to prevent it from souring; his paper is always lively and readable. Address E. Mason, Jr., 143 North Tenth St., Philadelphia. Subscription, $1 a year.

MASON'S NUMISMATIC VISITOR AND PRICE CURRENT

is published as a Supplement to the Herald, to whose subscribers it is sent free; to non-subscribers the price is 50 cents a year.

THE COIN JOURNAL.

Was first issued July, 1879, of small size; has been several times enlarged, until at present it is a respectable sized quarto of eight pages. It is announced as a quarterly, at the modest subscription price of 25 cents a year. Its editor and proprietor is Charles Steigerwalt, of Lancaster, Penn.

THE AMERICAN NUMISMATIC HERALD.

The first number bears date 1879, and announced itself as an annual; circulation 25 copies, and subscription price five cents; it is now a semi-annual at ten cents a year, and promises for its next number a circulation of 1200. Its editor, A. B. Carmen, may be addressed at East Richland, Ohio.

COIN COLLECTOR'S ILLUSTRATED GUIDE.

This latest aspirant for numismatic honors is published quarterly in Philadelphia; the first number, containing 20 pages in octavo form, is dated March, 1880, mostly filled with good selections, interesting to coin collectors. Terms, 50 cents a year. Editor and Proprietor, A. M. Smith, 533 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia.

THE AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN.

Though this publication is not devoted to Numismatics as a specialty, yet, as it treats of subjects dear to the heart of the numismatist, it is given a place in this list. It is an illustrated quarterly of 72 pages, and treats on all subjects pertaining to the Antiquities of America, Coins, Indian and Pre-historic Remains, Stone and Copper Implements, Indian Languages, Customs, and Traditions, &c., &c. No subject interesting to the American archaeologist is neglected. In connection with it is published another quarterly, THE ORIENTAL AND BIBLICAL JOURNAL, devoted especially to the archaeology of Classical, Biblical and Oriental Lands. Both of these Journals have as contributors the most eminent scholars and specialists in the various departments. They are edited with signal ability by Rev. Stephen D. Peet, of Clinton, Wisconsin, and are deserving of a liberal support. The subscription price of the American Antiquarian is $3 a year; of the Oriental Journal, $2; or the two magazines for $4. The Antiquarian is now near the close of its second year. Published by Jameson and Morse, Chicago, Illinois.

I will undertake to forward subscriptions to any of the publications mentioned, free of cost to the subscribers or publishers, and earnestly recommend numismatists and archaeologists to do as I do myself—subscribe for every one of them.

W. E. W.

In the January number, I listed each of the one hundred and sixteen catalogues issued by the late, great B. Max Mehl. Ironically, since that time, I have had the good fortune to have been consigned a complete set of Mehl sales which should certainly be the highlight of my August 14 auction. All in all, the set is comprised of nice, clean copies, the majority also containing prices realized lists. In preparing to catalogue the auction, I researched as many numismatic literature sales as possible over the past twenty-five years, and I can locate no offering of a complete set of Mehl's in any one sale. To be sure, probably all have been offered individually at one time or another, but apparently they have not been placed on the block "en masse." Even the vast holdings of the American Numismatic Society do not contain a complete set of Mehl catalogues, lacking the eighteenth sale (Eastwood) to achieve totality. I just hope I don't get them all "dog-earred," as I haven't been able to lay them down since they arrived.

If I may be permitted to stray from the intended purpose of "W.N.R.," I would like to take a few lines to list some of the other desirable pieces so far consigned to what should prove to be a most exciting and eventful sale in San Diego this summer. I have the pleasure of being able to offer a complete set of the scarce and extremely important "American Journal of Numismatics." The last complete offering of this highly prized journal brought $6,300.00 nearly two years ago. Complementing the "A.J.N.'s" is a set of "The Numismatist," complete from 1894. A bound set brought $3,500.00 in my first mail bid sale on December 8, 1981.

I am also pleased to be able to offer one of the rarest works in American numismatics, a very fine copy of E. J. Attinelli's "Numisgraphics," published in 1876. In my brief career, I have been fortunate to have handled three copies of this exceedingly rare work. The first sold in my second sale last May for $900.00, and I subsequently sold another copy through private treaty last summer for more than $1,000.00. It is generally accepted that less than fifty copies of this highly under-appreciated treatise were originally printed. Certainly no more than twenty to twenty-five are known today, and the copy to be offered in San Diego must rank as one of the finest extant.

For the lovers of old copper, there will be a number of classic references in the sale. Among these are fine copies of Frossard & Hays' "Varieties of United States Cents of the Year 1794" (1910); S. H. Chapman's "The United States Cents of the Year 1794" (1926 edition); Clapp & Newcomb's "The United States Cents of the Years 1795-1796-1797-1800" (1947); Clapp's "The United States Cents of the Years 1798-1799" (1931); Howard R. Newcomb's "The United States Cents of the Years 1801-1802-1803" (1925); a bound presentation copy of Numismatic Gallery's "United States Large Cents 1793-1857" (Pearl Collection) (1944); and a very fine copy of B. Max Mehl's "Collection of Large United States Cents 1793-1857" (George French Collection) (1930).

Though but a few titles are listed above, I trust that my readers have gained an idea of the magnitude and importance of the upcoming sale. Cataloguing is now underway, and I hope to have it completed and in your hands in early July.

CAL WILSON - FINE NUMISMATIC LITERATURE - 38228 GLENMOOR DR., FREMONT, CA 94536
(415) 792-4133